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## **REPORT**

### **POLISH CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

**Main Research Results**

**March 1998**

## **POLISH CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

The Institute of Public Affairs conducts research and analyses concerning the attitudes of key social groups towards the European integration. The objective of the present study is to determine the views of the Roman Catholic priests and to confront them with stereotypes and current opinions concerning the attitudes of the clergy. We also aimed to find out whether the official attitude of the church, as expressed by John Paul II and the Polish Episcopate, is shared by priests on the parish level.

The Catholic Church played a significant role in the turning points of the nation's history. Speaking out on key issues, the church influenced the course of events, providing many social groups with directions for decisions and actions. This is why it is of such importance to learn about the true attitudes and views of the priest on the European integration. Especially so that in years to come the clergy will be looked upon by parishioners as one of the sources of information on the European integration.

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## RESEARCH RESULTS SUMMARY

1. The Roman Catholic clergy hold a positive attitude towards the integration process. The favourable attitude shown by Pope John Paul II and by the Polish Episcopal Conference is of a major significance in this context. Factors underlying that positive attitude may be connected to the level of education of clergy as a group, their relatively large interest in public affairs, their knowledge of foreign languages, as well as travels, more frequent than the average, to the European Union countries.
2. Priests evaluate very positively the impact of Poland's accession to the European Union on the country's economy and the economic attitudes of citizens, international security, the rule of law, the development of democracy, state reforms, the level of public awareness, and the access to cultural heritage. On the other hand, in their opinion, the integration process will produce a negative impact on the moral and religious aspects of life, the coherence of Polish families, and the religious beliefs of Poles. However, according to some of the clergymen, these developments are results of more general civilisation processes which appear inevitable.
3. The unification process is not viewed as a major threat to the Church and to the clergy themselves. Most of the priests hold the opinion that integration will not result in diminishing the role of the Church. Polish priests do not feel personally threatened by consequences of the integration process either; they do not think that the process may produce a major impact on their incomes, influence or role in the society. This may also encourage a positive attitude of the surveyed group towards integration.
4. The general public is much more moderate in its opinions compared to the clergy. The attitudes held by Poles on the whole are neither very positive (e.g., their evaluation of the impact which integration will produce on their attitude towards work or their financial situation), nor very negative (as regards the coherence of Polish families). The priests show stronger support for integration compared to the rest of the people, but they are also more concerned and pessimistic as regards the problems related to the adjustment period.
5. The Roman Catholic clergymen view the European Union mainly as a community of interests. In their opinion, it should also be a community of values. This outlook is

connected to certain fears concerning changes which may occur in the Polish identity as a result of opening to Europe. According to the surveyed group, the essence of that identity consists in religion, patriotism and family values, which may become weaker.

6. The priests valued quite highly the efficiency and the democratic character of the Union's institutions. At the same time, a vast majority of them rejected the federate idea opting for not so close a formula of political association. That was reflected by the priests' clear support for the slogan 'Europe of Nations', which they interpreted as respect for the identity of individual nations combined with the greatest possible preservation of sovereignty by European states.
7. A majority of priests believe that an indifferent attitude of the state towards religion prevails in the EU countries, while the respondents approve of arrangements regulating the relations between the state and the Church on the basis of autonomy and cooperation, similar to the formula adopted in the Polish Constitution and the Concordat between Poland and the Apostolic See.
8. The clergymen hold the opinion that Poland's accession to the Union confronts the Church with new challenges. These challenges are mainly related to the evangelisation mission of the Church in Poland and in Europe, the promotion of Christian ethical principles, as well as the Polish cultural and national identity. The priests also see a need for education and information activities directly related to integration.
9. In view of the prospects for integration, the priests believe that there is a need for more concerted opinions among the clergy. In addition to that, they believe that it is more important to develop the people's faith and morality than to fill the churches. The challenges posed by the civilisation also make it necessary to seek new forms of religious life.
10. Clergymen are often listeners of Radio Maryja: 60% of the priests listen to that radio station at least several times a week or more often. However, this does not have a major impact on their assessment of the Church's position in the society or their evaluation of the consequences of Poland's integration with the European Union.

## **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POLISH CATHOLIC CLERGY**

Clergymen constitute a uniform group in terms of their level and kind of education: all of them have higher education: they are higher seminary graduates and one in three of them holds an additional college or university diploma. They are much more interested in politics compared to the Polish average: 35% priest declare a very large or large interest in politics, compared to 31% of Polish college and university graduates and 12% Poles surveyed as a nation-wide random sample population.

Priests often travel. Nearly all of them have been abroad: at least once (91%), several of a couple of dozen times (76%). They also know foreign languages (69%), including 28% who know two foreign languages or more. Clergymen declare predominantly the knowledge of the German language (56%), followed by English (28%). Thus, we are dealing not only with a well educated group, but also entering into frequent interactions with countries other than Poland and other cultures.

Members of the surveyed group are satisfied with their financial status: 68% of the priests described their situation as good or rather good, compared to 27% of all Poles (according to an opinion poll by the CBOS, January 1997). Thus, one may say that, among the clergy as a group, a low degree of frustration may be felt as regards their living standards.

## **APPROVAL FOR INTEGRATION AND THE SOCIAL FACTORS UNDERLYING THAT APPROVAL**

Compared to the Polish average, priests show much stronger approval for Poland's accession to the European Union.

**Table 1.**

How are you going to vote if a referendum were held in Poland on the accession to the European Union?	Replies in percent and the date of the surveys		
	Feb. 1998 a nation-wide population sample	Feb. 1998 college or university graduates	<b>Jan. 1998 surveyed group of priests</b>
in favour of Poland's accession to the EU	64	80	<b>84</b>
against Poland's accession to the EU	9	6	<b>6</b>
I would not take part in the referendum	13	5	<b>3</b>
difficult to say	14	9	<b>7</b>

Data: the Public Affairs Institute

**Table 2**

In your opinion, when, if ever, should Poland become a fully fledged member of the European Union?	Replies in percent and the date of the surveys		
	Feb. 1998 a nation-wide population sample	Feb. 1998 college or university graduates	<b>Jan. 1998 surveyed group of priests</b>
by the year 2000	40	44	<b>44</b>
in five years	25	34	<b>32</b>
in ten years	10	5	<b>11</b>
later than that	4	5	<b>4</b>
never	6	5	<b>1</b>
difficult to say	16	6	<b>9</b>

Data: the Public Affairs Institute

Integration appears to the clergy as the goal shared by all the forces functioning in the conflicted political arena, as an expression of similarly defined national interests.

**Table 3:** opinions presented as a percentage of replies given by priests

In your opinion, which institutions and political parties will support the process of Poland's accession to the European Union, and which will be delaying it?	Definitely will support	Rather will support	Rather/ definitely will delay	Neither will support nor delay
the Freedom Union (UW)	66	27	0	0
Solidarity Election Action (AWS)	49	43	2	2
the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	28	41	16	4
the Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland (ROP)	14	37	27	5
the PSL peasant party	8	26	46	7
the Government	64	30	1	0
the Polish Episcopal Conference	40	49	1	3

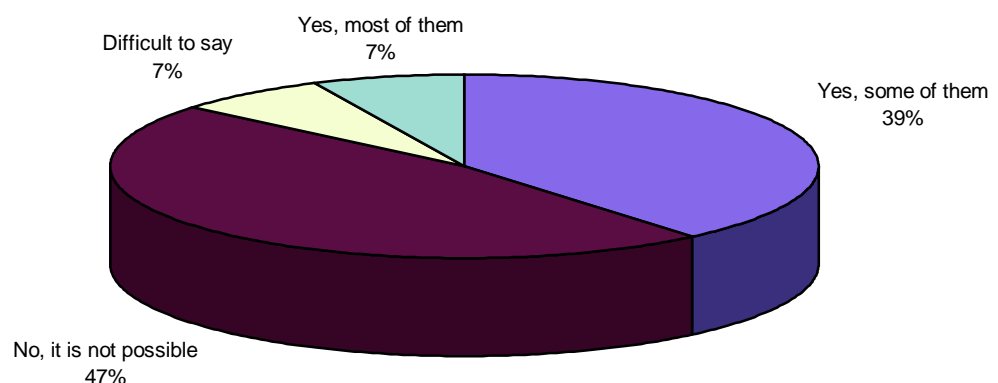
Priests have no doubts as regards the position held by the Polish Episcopal Conference and the attitude of Pope John Paul II who supports integration according to 82% of them.

Clergymen evaluate very positively the consequences of Poland's accession to the European Union for the main areas of the social and political life, as well as the economy. Their positive attitude concerning the results of integration is accompanied by the belief that most social groups will benefit from the process. Only the farmers are going to incur most of the costs of the adjustment process.

At the same time, priests believe that integration will produce a number of developments negative from the point of the view of the Church. They project a growth in materialist attitudes, an increase in the activities of sects, and a greater indifference towards issues related to faith and religion. Some of the surveyed clergymen hold the opinion that integration will pose numerous threats to family values.

Nevertheless, a majority of respondents seem to believe that the threats to traditional role models and moral values originate much more from long term and omnipresent civilisation processes, rather than as a result of the European integration process. Therefore, little would be changed in this respect by abandoning integration.

**Father, do you think that it is possible to prevent the above developments by abandoning Poland's integration with the European Union?**



## THE POLISH ROAD TO INTEGRATION

A large group of clergymen are cautious in their attitude towards the proposals calling for a fast accession to the European Union. In their opinion, too fast integration may doom Poland to assume a worse, unequal position within the European structures given the limited competitiveness of the Polish economy.

**Table 4:** replies in percent

In your opinion	Percentage of replies		
	August 1997, a nation-wide population sample		Jan. 1998
	surveyed population	college and university graduates	surveyed priests
Poland should first improve and modernise its economy, and only then should it make efforts to join the European Union	43	38	51
Poland should make efforts to join the European Union as soon as possible because the membership of the European Union will accelerate the improvement and modernisation of the Polish economy	39	56	42
Poland should not try to join the European Union at all	-	-	2
Difficult to say	19	6	5

Data: 1997 by the CBOS polling centre; 1998 by the Public Affairs Institute

Compared to the rest of the Polish public, priests are more convinced about the need to undertake modernisation efforts.

**Table 5:** replies in percent

In your opinion, the terms of Poland's accession to the European Union will depend on:	Feb. 1998 nation-wide population sample	surveyed priests
readiness, skills and firm attitude shown by Polish negotiators	20	<b>21</b>
advancement of reforms and modernisation in Poland	35	<b>42</b>
a political decision by the EU member states	31	<b>31</b>

Data: the Public Affairs Institute



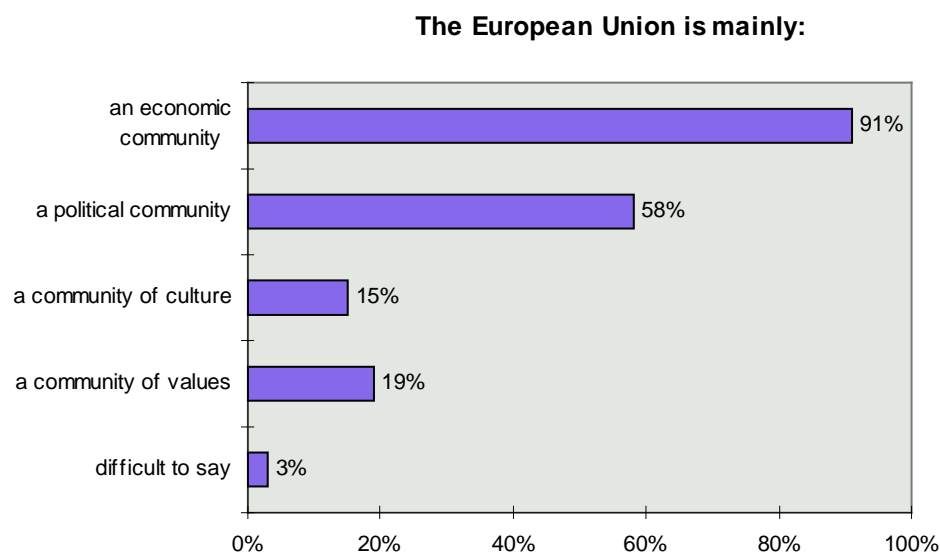
## PERCEPTION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The attitude towards the European Union is also connected to the image and evaluation of the Community and its institutions. The issue of values which should lay the foundations of the Union is particularly important to representatives of the clergy. Thus, it is worthwhile to look at opinions held by priests about the Union and at their expectations concerning the future shape of the organisation.

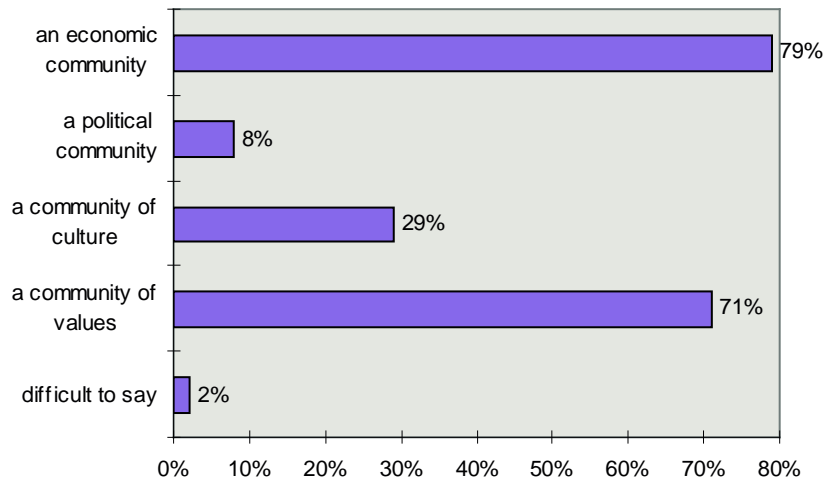
Priests believe that the EU member states are united predominantly by *common interests*, whereas a *community of values* should also play an important role.

### FATHER, IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN UNION AND WHAT SHOULD IT BE?

(respondents were asked to choose no more than two options)

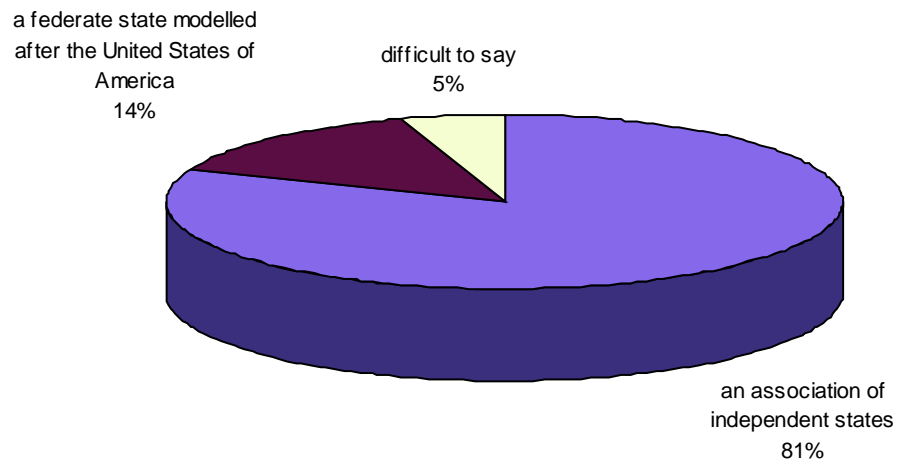


### The European Union should be mainly



Only 8% of the surveyed priests believe that the Union should be mainly a political community. This means that clergymen support a confederate model of the European Union.

### Father, in your opinion, the European Union should rather be:



A vast majority of the surveyed priests rejected the federate idea, opting for looser forms of political association. That was reflected by the clear support (80%) shown for the slogan “Europe of Nations”, which, in their understanding, combined

respect for the identity of individual nations with maintaining the fullest extent of sovereignty of European states.

Priests valued quite highly the efficiency and the democratic character of the Union's institutions, but that assessment had little impact on their cautious attitude towards the political aspects of the unification process.

## **THE CHURCH IN POLAND DURING THE PERIOD OF THE SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION**

The surveyed priests voiced polarised opinions as regards the situation of the Catholic Church in Poland during the period of structural reforms (years 1989-1997). A vast majority of clergymen have observed an increase in the presence of the Church in public life. At the same time, nearly a half of respondents hold the opinion that the influence of the Church on shaping the public's opinions has diminished over that period, while more than a half believe that the charisma of the Church in the eyes of the public is lower than it used to be before 1989. Thus, according to a majority of the surveyed priests, an increase in the presence of the Church in various areas of public life is not coupled by the public's respect for the Church, and does not enhance the opinion making role of the Church in the society.

**Table 6:** replies in percent

Father, in your opinion:				
	has increased	has diminished	has not changed	difficult to say
after 1989, the influence of the Church on shaping the public opinion	13	49	32	6
after 1989, the impact of the Church on the state policy	21	23	42	14
after 1989, the presence of the Church in public life	65	6	26	3

The belief held by priests about a falling influence of the Church on public opinion may be a result of their assessment of religious attitudes of their parishioners. According to 44% of the surveyed clergymen, Poles are now less religious than they used to be before 1989, while 46% have observed no change in this respect.

A relatively large group of respondents have observed no change in the financial situation of the Catholic Church in Poland and in the financial status of priests, although according to a comparably large group, the financial situation has deteriorated. At the same time, more than a half of respondents believe that the Polish clergy are the social category which has “neither gained nor lost” during the process of reforms, which implies that their group interests have not been violated in any way. Thus, the Church is not viewed by its representatives as an institution whose situation has deteriorated.

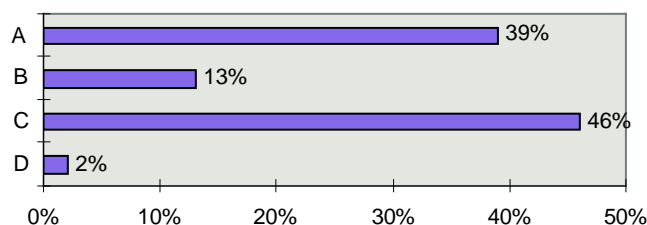
**Table 7:** replies in percent

In your opinion, Father:	has improved	has deteriorated	has not changed	difficult to say
after 1989, the financial situation of the Catholic Church in Poland	16	36	39	9
after 1989, the financial status of Catholic priests in Poland	8	38	42	13

## EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND THE POSITION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The factors which determine the attitudes towards the European Union may include, among others, the situation of the Churches in the member states. A majority of priests believe that the Union is dominated by an indifferent attitude of the state towards religion. Under these circumstances, it is worthwhile to look at the expectations of Polish clergymen concerning the European Union’s policy towards religion and the Churches.

**Father, what in your opinion, should be the policy of  
the European Union towards religions and Churches?  
Should the European institutions rather:**

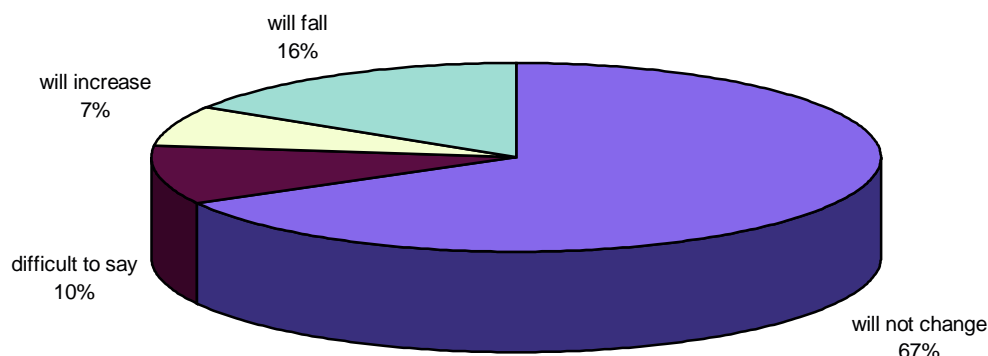


- A: support actively the development of religious life and institutions, both Christian and non-Christian ones;
- B: support actively the development of religions, but only the Christian ones
- C: restrict themselves to ensuring the freedom of preaching religion and the freedom of conscience
- D: difficult to say

The opinion which slightly prevailed among the surveyed priests was that there was a need to promote religions and Churches in the European Union. However, the group comprised of priests who were sceptical towards the idea of European institutions supporting the development of religions, and who believed that religious freedom guarantees were sufficient, was not much smaller. That may be explained by a strongly established reluctance towards all institutional measures promoting specific beliefs, ideologies, or systems of values, which originated from the recent experience of a totalitarian state. On the other hand, arrangements regulating relations between the state and the Church on the basis of principles of autonomy and cooperation, similar to the system adopted in the Polish Constitution and the Concordat between Poland and the Apostolic See, enjoyed the respondents approval.

The surveyed priests believed that integration will produce positive results for Poland, but it will not have a major impact on the situation of the Church. A majority of the clergymen do not expect changes in that area.

**How will integration with the European Union effect the position and influence of the Catholic Church in Poland? The position and influence of the Church:**



There is a prevailing opinion among the priests about a balanced character of the losses and benefits resulting for the Church in connection to the integration process, although, at a personal level, there is a more frequent trend to notice benefits.

**Table 8:** replies in percent

Will Poland's integration with the European Union produce:	More benefits than losses			More losses than benefits			It will have no impact		
	May 1996		Jan. 1998	May 1996		Jan. 1998	May 1996		Jan. 1998
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
for Poland	45	55	<b>49</b>	9	4	<b>7</b>	28	30	<b>31</b>
for the Catholic Church in Poland	-	-	<b>23</b>	-	-	<b>19</b>	-	-	<b>37</b>
for you personally	28	37	<b>25</b>	6	3	<b>6</b>	23	29	<b>36</b>

A: a nation-wide population sample

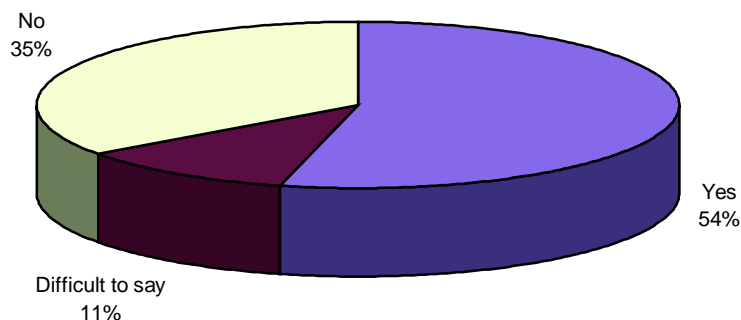
B: college or university graduates

**C: surveyed priests**

Data: 1996 by the CBOS polling centre; 1998 by the Public Affairs Institute

Despite the fact that a majority of respondents believe that integration will not have a major impact on the position of the Church and the clergy, they notice threats resulting from the process.

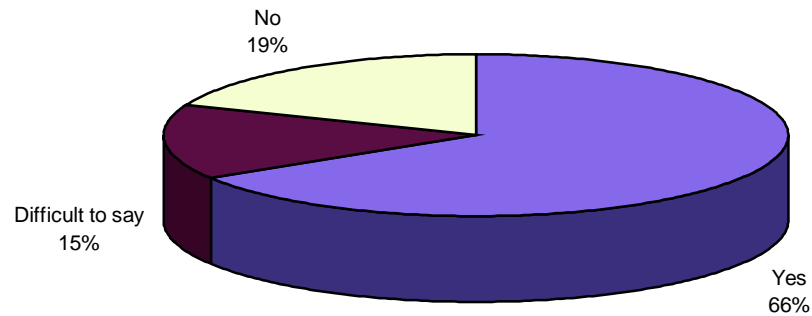
**Do you think, Father, that Poland's integration with the European Union may involve some threats to the Church in Poland?**



Those priests who observe threats related to Poland's accession to the European Union, see the dangers mostly in the areas of religiousness and morality. As regards specific signs of negative changes occurring in the mentality of Poles identified by respondents, these included predominantly the priority of material over spiritual values, the quest for money and prosperity, an excessive drive to riches, a consumption life style, the weakening of family ties, a fall in the significance of the family, a growing number of divorces, a lack of concern for the upbringing of children and young people.

A majority of priests hold the opinion that the prospects for integration face the Church with new tasks.

**Do Poland's prospects for integration with the European Union impose any new tasks upon the Church in Poland?**



The following challenges to the Church in Poland were identified:

- ⇒ tasks related to the evangelising mission of the Church;
- ⇒ tasks related to the development of the Christian ethics, also the universally human ethics;
- ⇒ tasks related to maintaining the Polish national and cultural identity; and
- ⇒ tasks related directly to the integration process, including education activities in the broad sense, as well as opening to and dialogue with other cultures and religions.

The table below presents the opinions held by priests concerning the desirable directions in the development of the Church in Poland in the context of the upcoming integration:



**Table 9:** replies in percent

Integration is sometimes described as a challenge for the Church. Given the prospects for Poland's accession to the European structures, should the Church in Poland:	
- accept to a greater extent differences of opinion among the clergy	26
- try to achieve the greatest possible homogeneity of opinions among the clergy	58
difficult to say	15
- make efforts to attract the greatest number of believers to the Church, even if they do not accept fully the religious dogmas and the moral principles preached by the Church	9
- first of all, make efforts to develop faith and morality within the Church, even at the cost of losing followers	86
difficult to say	5
- place a greater stress than to date on preaching religious dogmas	45
- place a greater stress than to date on promoting the Christian moral principles	33
- place a greater stress than to date on social issues and charity work (to fight poverty, unemployment, to help the homeless, etc.)	7
difficult to say	15
- develop mainly the traditional forms of religious life	28
- seek new forms of religious life	60
difficult to say	12

There is a prevailing view held by more than a half of respondents that, at the moment, there is a need for a greater unanimity of opinion among the clergy. The group holding the belief that greater differences of opinion should be accepted within the Church (a little over a quarter of respondents) is less than a half compared to the previous one.

Nearly all of the surveyed priests agreed that it was more important to develop faith and morality than to fill the churches. The opinion that it is necessary to accept the greatest possible number of believers to the Church, even if they do not agree fully with the religious dogmas and the moral principles of the Church is held by less than a tenth of respondents.

The belief that the prospects for integration require a change in the religious life of Poles is reflected in viewing evangelisation as the most important task confronting the Church at the moment.

The opinion clearly prevails among the surveyed priests to view integration as a challenge, but with a full awareness of the threats posed by the process. There is no doubt that such an approach is more creative because it implies readiness for changes, readiness to accept tasks aiming to consolidate the Church, including predominantly the development of religious life of Poles and their religious revival.

## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONDUCT OF THE SURVEY**

The research was based on the assumption that a half of the surveyed priests would be parish priests, while the remaining half would be vicars. The choice of the sample population was similar in both cases, and took into account the following three main factors: the existing division into 14 arch-dioceses; the type of a parish (urban, rural, urban-rural); the size of the parish measured in terms of the number of believers. Overall, the basic sample of 613 parishes was drawn.

Out of the initially planned 613 interviews, 585 were held, which corresponded to 95% of the chosen sample. Among all the interviews, 475 were held within the basic sample population (77% of the chosen sample), while the remaining 110 were held among the reserve population (18% of the chosen sample). It is worthwhile to stress that, in the opinion polls conducted on a monthly basis by the CBOS government run opinion research centre on a nation-wide randomly chosen population sample, the average rate of interviews held is 76%. This means that the effectiveness of the survey of the basic chosen population (around 77%) did not differ much from that.

A vast majority of the pollsters stressed a positive and kind attitude of respondents towards the research and the surveying staff, although several interviews were not held in the Kalisz diocese due to a lack of consent from the local bishop.